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# Development Communication Training in Nigeria: Notes and Observations

by Jubril Bala Mohammed\*

## Abstract

This article is a response to the quest for more relevant strategies for communication training in Africa. It reviews the liberal social theories upon which Third World studies have been anchored and rejects them for having led to the current crisis of theory in communication training. Opting for a Marxian political economy approach, it suggests, *inter alia*, the study of imperialism in all its manifestations as a way of understanding the current reality in Africa; the need to relate theory and practice (through field work) in communication training; and the incorporation of sufficient social science theories and applications thereof into communication syllabi of African training institutions.

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\*Mr. Jubril Bala Mohammed is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

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# Stage sur la Communication de Développement au Nigéria: Notes et observations.

## Résumé

Cet article est une réponse à la quête pour des stratégies plus appropriées de formation en matière de communication en Afrique. Il passe en revue les théories sociales libérales sur lesquelles les études des pays du Tiers-Monde ont été basées et les rejète pour avoir conduit à la crise actuelle de la théorie sur la formation en matière de communication. L'article opte pour une approche politico-économique marxienne et propose, entre autres, l'étude de l'impérialisme dans toutes ses manifestations, comme un moyen de comprendre la réalité actuelle en Afrique. Le besoin d'établir une interaction entre la théorie et la pratique (ou le travail sur le terrain) dans la formation sur la communication et l'introduction de suffisantes théories en sciences sociales et la subséquente introduction de celles-ci dans les programmes des institutions africaines de formation en matière de communication.

## Introduction

Some contemporary African social scientists, confronted with the inability of liberal social science theories of development to explain the peculiar social environmental realities in Africa have had to recourse to Marxian political economy as an alternative analytical model. (Onimode 1985; Nabudere 1977; Ake 1979; Barongo 1983). These social scientists focus on the understanding of the nature of imperialism as a necessary prelude to scientific inquiry into the genesis and historical processes involved in Africa's complex post-colonial existence. Thus they study various aspects of imperialism ranging from examination of the concept, its features, and historical development of neo-colonialism.

Bade Onimode (1985:27) notes that classical theories of economics preoccupy themselves with scarcity and (economic) relations between things, while Marxian political economy theories focus on how specific systems of economic relations in given historical epochs originate, develop, function and change. He says that:

While Marx recognized the importance of scarcity and analysed it for commodity producing economies, he insisted that different systems of production deal with scarcity and resource allocation differently. Thus, contrary to the false universalism of neoclassical economic theory anchored on this bogus notion of scarcity, Marx insisted that the theory of value relates to a historically specific (capitalist) method of resource allocation. While there are laws regulating the allocation of scarce resources in all societies, the form in which these laws operate differ with the social relations embodied in different systems of production such as capitalism, feudalism, socialism and so on.

In international relations the focus of much liberal scholarship has either been on the behaviour of states or balance of power while their theories vary from systems (integrationist and functionalist) actions of states or their interaction leading to the justification of imperialism. Citing Morgenthau's view of the theory of balance of power, which he presents as a 'device' for self defence of nations 'whose independence and existence is threatened by a disproportionate increase in the power of other nations' in the international system, Nabudere (1977) points out that such a theory provides a good disguise to rationalize and justify the irridentist and terrorist behaviour of the strong against the weaker nations. He shows how Morgenthau's view of imperialism not only legitimized imperialist behaviour but also offered tacit apologia for U.S. imperialism in particular.

Manning Nash (1963) identifies three basic currents in liberal theoretical approaches to the problem of social change and economic development in the Third World; he says:

The first mode is the index method: the general features of a developed economy are abstracted as an ideal type and then contrasted with the equally ideal typical features of a poor economy and society. In this mode, development is viewed as the transformation of one type into the other....

The second mode is the acculturation view of the process of development. The West (taken here as the Atlantic community of developed nations and their overseas outliers) diffuses knowledge, skills, organization, values, technology and capital to a poor nation until, overtime, its society, culture and personnel become variants of that which made the Atlantic community economically successful...

The third mode ... is the analysis of the process as it is now going on in the so-called underdeveloped nations. The approach leads to a smaller scale hypothesis, to a prospective rather than a retrospective view of social change, to a full accounting of the political, social and cultural contexts of development.

Similar theories are advanced by Hoselitz (1960), Parsons (1960), Moore and Feldman (1960), Lerner (1958), McClelland (1964), and Kunkel (1965).

Frank (1972:320) points out that when confronted with reality, these social theories have been found 'to be empirically invalid..., theoretically inadequate (even) in terms of...classical social scientific standards, and policy-wise ineffective for pursuing (the) supposed intentions of promoting the development of the underdeveloped countries'. These theories have not borne fruitful results in terms of understanding and explaining contemporary African social reality either (Ake 1979; 1981, Barongo 1983, Nnoli 1980, and Nabudere 1977).

Summing up the experiences of African social scientists, Jimada (1987) points out that these liberal social theories of development have merely succeeded in making 'the African to be able to apply European solutions to African problems'; he advises that 'if these solutions fail as they have to-date, then we must evolve new approaches' (Jimada 1987).

This position was foreshadowed in 1965 at a conference of Latin American economists in Mexico after the same experience. The declaration stated, in part, that it is due to these negative experiences with liberal social theories of development 'that the fundamental task of this Conference must be to devise the basis which will permit the structuring of a specifically Latin American theory of economic development, which is the rallying cry of the younger generation' (Frank and Bonilla 1972).

This paper, therefore, examines the training programme in 'development communication' in some higher institutions of learning in Nigeria and raises issues of a critical nature on the philosophy, theory and method of presentation of these programmes with the view to formulating a historically relevant and liberatory model for the training of African development communicators. The approach is necessary for making the trainee responsive and committed as an active participant in the unfolding process of social change and eventual liberation from underdevelopment.

## **Marxist Political Economy**

The term 'political economy' was first used by the French economist Antoine de Montchrestien (1575-1621) and later popularized by the

physiocrats in France and England including such notables as William Petty, Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Marxist political economy which arose from the work of the German philosophers, Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Fredrick Engels (1820-1895), was borne out of the critique of classical German philosophy, English political economy and sociology through to the politics of the communist manifesto (Onimode 1985:26). Thus, unknown to several opponents of this alternative methodology, Marxist political economy is both a direct descendant of Western social theory and, simultaneously, its anti-thesis.

Marxist political economy, also known as historical materialism, precedes from the application of dialectical materialism to the study of social phenomena. The distinguishing feature of dialectical materialism lies in the position that 'its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of studying and apprehending them, is dialectical, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is materialistic' (Stalin 1940:5).

There are four components of the dialectical method. These includes the view that no phenomenon exists in isolation; rather all phenomena exist in interconnections and interdependence; that all things are in continuous movement, change, disintegration and development; that (this) development is not circular but spiral, involving changes in quality and quantity as a condition for movement from lower to higher forms of existence; and that development is a consequence of the conflict from contradictory elements inherent in all things (Ibrahim 1983:36).

The interpretation of this dialectical process in all phenomena is materialistic, the central idea of which is presented once again by Stalin (1940:15-16) who states that:

Marxist materialist philosophy holds that matter, nature, being, is an objective reality existing outside and independent of our mind; that matter is primary, since it is the source of sensations, ideas, mind and that the mind is secondary, derivative since it is a reflection of matter, a reflection of being; that thought is a product of matter which in its development has reached a high degree of perfection namely, of the brain, and the brain is the organ of thought; and that therefore, one cannot separate thought from matter without committing a grave error.

This materialist conception implies that although matter or any such reality, seen as the object of our study (consciousness), exists independent of our knowledge of it; our knowledge or the consciousness of it, on the other hand, must of necessity be derivable from and correspond to it otherwise such consciousness would be deemed erroneous.

According to Marx (1968:41):

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of the material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure.

This implies that two levels exist in analysing human society from the Marxian materialist conception: first, the economic structure which revolves round the process of production and reproduction of material means of life; and second, the superstructural, which is the level of the various institutions, such as laws, the state, religion, philosophy, politics, ideology, etc. While the former attains a deterministic primacy in relation to the latter in Marxist political economy, critics of this perspective have often viewed this relationship with awe. This awe probably stems from the wrong interpretation of the relationship between the economic structure and the superstructure which is often presented in unilineal terms, rather than in a dialectical form. The implication of the dialectical interpretation of this relationship implies 'the need to combine political and economic analysis in explaining the unity of social phenomena' (Barratt-Brown 1978:9).

It, therefore, follows that in studying any aspect of (human social) reality from the Marxist political economy point of view, it is pertinent to locate this reality in the context of the existing mode of production and the influence of the attendant levels of class struggle on the said reality in the society in question. Thus, in the study of mass communication in contemporary society, for instance, a knowledge of capitalist mode of production, particularly the stage of imperialism, which is the highest stage (Lenin 1979), and the effect of the class struggle on the development of mass communication becomes an inescapable necessity.

It also follows that in fashioning out a training programme for prospective development communicators in Africa, a knowledge of imperialism and its ramifications on Third World development is imperative. This is important in order to equip the student of development communication with the knowledge of that which is the object of change as a precondition to Africa's development. Development, seen in a Marxian (political economy) perspective, is inherently a movement from a lower, undersirable state to a higher, better and desirable one. Development is, therefore, a process of liberation.

## **Development Communication Training in Nigeria**

The African Council on Communication Education (ACCE) directory, though not yet the most comprehensive, lists 43 communication training institutions in Nigeria. Of these, 9 exist as autonomous communication training institutions, 10 run courses in Mass Communication as part of other departments, while 24 schools have Mass Communication at full departmental levels (ACCE 1988). Most of these (43) training institutions offer certificate and diploma courses in (Mass) Communication to meet the manpower needs of the expanding media industry in the country.

On the basis of questionnaires sent to 11 higher institutions, — six universities and five polytechnics — with established departments of

Mass Communication, nine responded, out of which five — University of Lagos; Bayero University, Kano; Anambra State University of Science and Technology (ASUTECH), Enugu; Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta; and The Polytechnic, Ibadan — indicated that they run courses in Development Communication while the remaining four (University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna; and the Institute of Management and Technology — IMT —, Enugu) either do not teach the course or had plans to introduce it in their programmes in the near future. It is the syllabi of those five training institutions teaching the course that form the subject matter of this article.

At the University of Lagos, Communication for Development is offered as a course at the Bachelors and Masters degree levels. At the Bachelors level, focus is on theories and principles of Development Communication while at the Masters level, attention is focussed on development communication planning.

At the Bachelors level, the thrust of the course is trilateral, viz:

- (a) To define and explain basic concepts such as 'Development' 'Communication' and 'Development Communication';
- (b) To find out what communication can achieve under existing conditions and;
- (c) To discuss how communication can be used to change (these) restrictive conditions and smoothen the path of development.

The objective of the course at this level is basically 'to create (the) awareness of the place of communication (mass and interpersonal) within the larger context of the complex sets of relationships within the social, economic, cultural and political structures and processes in order to see the need for a clear understanding of what the prior limitations are and what conditions need to exist for communication to contribute to equitable development especially in the context of a developing economy' (University of Lagos, Department of Mass Communication Syllabus, 1987/88).

The method of presentation consists, to a large extent, of 'classroom lectures and discussions' and, where possible, 'invite one or two guest lecturers' to share the benefit of (their) practical experience.

At the Masters level, concern is with Development Communication planning. This consists of conceptual discourses on planning, the planning process, models of (development) planning, environmental influence on the development (planning) process, and constraints on development planning and communication policies. To complement the course at this level, organizational communication is taught as a course although it exists as an elective.

At the end of the course it is envisaged that students would be well grounded in development communication planning (and organizational communication) to facilitate their participation in development projects as communication experts and active agents.

Almost similar in objective is the Development Communication



programme at the Polytechnic, Ibadan. In his response to the questionnaire, Mr Tunde Akande, a lecturer in the Mass Communication Department said that the objective of the course is 'to let (the) students know fully the role communication, especially the mass media, (can) play in national development'. At the Polytechnic, Ibadan, communication for development as a course is offered in the first of the two-year Higher National Diploma (HND) programme in Mass Communication.

Communication for development also exists as a separate course in Mass Communication at the ASUTECH in Enugu. Titled 'Communication and National Development', the course is offered to final-year students at the Bachelors degree level.

The course content proceeds from a conceptual definition of 'development' and 'modernization' through a discussion of the distinction between development at individual and aggregate levels, to a discussion of the development process and the variety of communication activities involved therein.

Other areas of focus include the mass media consumption patterns of peoples in the advanced and less advanced countries; the role of interpersonal, group and mass communication in the process of rural development, and the facilitatory as well as inhibitive factors in that respect.

At the Bayero University in Kano, Communication and Development as the course is titled, is offered in the second year of the Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communication. The objective of the course is to 'give the students an understanding of the relationship between communication and development vis-a-vis the place of communication in (the) development process' (Bayero University, Kano, Mass Communication Syllabus 1987/88).

The course content opens with a conceptual discussion of development, its process and historical significance as a background to an understanding of (social) communication, its process and functions. Attention is also paid to theories of development — especially persuasive communication theories and innovation diffusion. An appraisal of 'Nigerian communication channels' (sic:) in the process of development follows, leading finally to a review of selected models in, and case studies of, some selected 'development-oriented communication campaigns'.

At the Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Development Communication is shared among two courses: 'International Communication' and 'Issues and Problems in Communication' existing at three and four hundred levels, respectively.

At the 300 level, the course examines 'International flow of media and cultural products and the implication of this for social and cultural change in both developed and developing societies' and 'critically examines recent theoretical and empirical developments in this area'.

Topics here begin with an introduction to methodological approaches

to the study of International Communication followed by a review of theories of imperialism and theories of development, both liberal-pluralist and neo-Marxist. Subsequent attention is paid to mass media and development, media imperialism, news flow, the (quest for) New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and cultural dependence.

At the 400 level, the course centres round a discussion of contemporary issues in communication for development. The approach involves small teams and groupings reviewing assigned materials and making classroom (seminar-like) presentations. These presentations commence after a period of introductory lectures.

From the review above, the following observations can be made. First, there appears to be a tacit unity of silence on methodological questions in Development Communication. With the exception of the Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta, none of the syllabi examined have made discussion of contending methodologies in this area a worthy prelude to their programmes. This silence tends to give the impression that there exists a monolithic perspective on development communication.

As a young field of study, development communication theorists and scholars are still unable to resolve their differences on the actual, specific and concrete role of (mass) communication in the development process. For instance, some scholars, mostly of the liberal-pluralist persuasion, suggest that (mass) communication plays a facilitatory role in the process of development (Lerner 1958; Schramm 1964; Pye 1964; Rao 1966; Rogers 1968). An adaptation of this position has drawn attention to 'oramedia' operating side by side with the mass media in the development process (Ugboajah 1986; Boafo 1986).

Scholars of the dependency school, on the other hand, suggest that in the context of the centre-periphery dichotomy, the entire process of development (seen by liberal scholars as modernization), the hard and soft ware of development including communication, enhance the cultural dominance, among others, of the former over the latter (Frank 1969; Schiller 1976).

It is pertinent that these contending approaches should not be subsumed (as if they don't exist). They should be presented and thoroughly discussed and the implication of each to development communication studies in Africa (if only to expose the prospective communicator to a broader perspective of the subject matter of his pursuit) be identified, documented and presented. This way, the prospective communicator would be intimated with the state of methodological differences in the area but also imbued with a critical view point.

Another observation is pertinent on the underlying assumptions behind the course as presented in virtually all the institutions whose programmes were reviewed. Inherent in the syllabi are the assumptions

that there exists a bad (social) state which calls forward the necessity for development (programmes) to overcome, and that communication has a role to play in executing these development programmes. These assumptions capture the popular mood in the polity, a mood expressed in the need to overcome 'underdevelopment' through sustained development by local organizations, governments and international bodies.

To this extent, the programmes appear to be responding to social pressure for development. Nevertheless, in responding to this pressure, little attention is paid to the need for the study of that bad (social) state which is the object to be overcome through sustained development. Crucial questions that ought to be addressed here include the following: what is this bad (and undersirable) state of affairs; how did it come about; what is its scope; to what extent has it affected the social, economic, cultural and political lives of the people concerned; what social base sustains/militates against this bad state; and how can it be negated, etc? The need for this examination is, however, not reflected in all the syllabi examined, with the possible exception of that of the Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta.

Yet another observation revolves around the question of theory. Except for the Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta, the theoretical approach to the course is critical, particularly in the context of the course in International Communication; the approach in the other institutions smack of a preponderance of liberal-pluralist theories. This is attested to by the list of recommended readings accompanying each syllabus.

From the critical perspective at Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta, the recommended texts include readings from the traditional fathers of development communication such as Daniel Lerner (1958), Wilbur Schramm (1964), Lucien Pye (1964); Everett Rogers (1968); through cultural dependencists such as Frank (1969); Schiller and Matterlart (1976), to African 'Oramedists' such as Ugboajah (1986), and Boafo (1986) and Marxist scholars such as Golding (1974) and Lenin (1979). This broadbased yet critical perspective is preferable in training prospective communicators in the process of preparing them into active agents in the development process in contemporary African societies.

At the University of Lagos; Bayero University, Kano, The Polytechnic, Ibadan, and ASUTECH, Enugu, the recommended texts are decidedly of the liberal-pluralist bend. For instance, at the University of Lagos and Bayero University, Kano, recommended texts range from Lerner (1958), Schramm (1964), Garner (1977), Nnoli (1977), and Moemeka (1981) with a few institutional publications from the East-West Communication Centre, Hawaii (1984).

Thus, as contradistinctive from the broadbased and critical theoretical approach of the Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta, the rest of the higher institutions of learning conduct the course from a narrow liberal pluralist

(theoretical) perspective.

These observations on the philosophical and theoretical problems in Development Communication training arising from the review of the course syllabi in some higher institutions of learning in Nigeria would indisputably affect the quality and nature of theoretical preparation of would-be development communicators and have bearings on their performance. Some of them, trained in the expectation of becoming experts and active participants in the unfolding development process in their society, almost appear helpless once confronted with the reality of underdevelopment in the wider society. Being so unprepared, such young experts easily get neutralized and/or 'co-opted' into the system, a condition which underlies the state of resignation reflected in the expression: 'There is a world of difference between the four walls of the university and the wider society'.

The basis of this fatalistic feeling lies in the kind of intellectual and academic preparation offered to the prospective development communicator which is either predicated on a mechanistic, ahistorical and unscientific view of social reality and a disjointed, skeletal and superficial view of it.

It is to prevent the neutralization of these young experts that some recommendations are proffered below as a contribution towards the evolution of a unified methodological and theoretical approach to the training of Africa's development communicators.

### **A Liberatory Approach to Development Communication Training**

Development consists of liberation from a less desirable to a more desirable form of social existence. It is a process of movement from a lower to a higher form. In this regard, a critical focus on methodological issues in the social sciences is adopted as a prelude to the understanding of social reality.

The proposed focus must review the standpoint of the two major contending methodologies: the liberal-pluralist and Marxist political economy and their respective variants. This view should focus on the relevance of each in understanding the African reality as it is and the dynamics of its movement. This alternative approach should involve an examination of behaviorist and positivist social theories and their influence on development studies and latter-day challenges from Marxist political economy and its variants such as cultural dependence and social structuralist theories.

Secondly, consideration should be accorded to the understanding of imperialism in relation to the underdeveloped situation of African societies. This is necessary given the fact that until the 1950s and 1960s, almost the whole of the African continent was under direct colonial domination. In some parts of the continent, especially the coastal areas,

colonialism dated from the 17th and 18th centuries, while in most of the hinterland, total colonial subjugation was effected around the beginning of the 20th century. What this implies is that the effects of the structures of imperialist domination, laid several centuries ago, could not have been dismantled soon after the attainment of political independence a few decades back. Mention must be made of the monocultural nature of the economies of African countries, the rural-urban dichotomy and the commoditization of African economies, all existing contemporaneously in Africa as legacies of its colonial past.

Any relevant, liberatory strategy in development communication training must, therefore, incorporate a thorough study of the relation of imperialism to Africa's underdevelopment.

Another recommendation relates to the area of method of presentation of the course. Except for the Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta, where the seminar-like group presentation in addition to classroom lectures are adopted side by side, the rest of the institutions whose programmes were reviewed adopt the lecture-discussion and guest lecturer method. It is suggested that all the methods mentioned above should be utilized together with field trips where possible. This would enhance healthy correspondence between theory and practice in development communication training.

## Summary and Conclusion

This paper has attempted to draw attention to the increasing state of disaffection with liberal social science theories. It has reviewed some literature to show that African social scientists, in the quest for an alternative approach to the study of the problems of social change and development have been focussing on an examination of imperialism and imperialist social science in all their ramifications. Only seldom do these efforts rely on the Marxist political economy approach.

This article uses the Marxist political economy approach to examine the training programmes in development communication as a course of study being offered in some of Nigeria's higher institutions of learning. This review finds that, in the syllabi reviewed, only little or no attention is paid to questions of methodology in the teaching of the social sciences in general, and development communication in particular. There is an overdose of liberal social theories as evidenced by reading lists which accompany the syllabi of the various higher institutions examined.

The paper also adds to the literature decrying the effect of this lopsidedness as being responsible for the helplessness the young development communicator faces once out in the field.

Three suggestions have been proffered in order to enrich the training programmes in this crucial area. These suggestions center round the need for preliminary discussions of methodological questions in the social

sciences as a background of the course; the need to focus on imperialism as a necessary condition in grappling with the fundamental base of underdevelopment in Africa, and the need to pay more attention to a method of presentation which enhances a marriage of theory and practice.

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